

part in that event. This statement was written for me by Governor Price:

In July, 1845, the United States sloop of war *Cyane*, Captain William Mervine, sailed from Norfolk under orders to join the Pacific Squadron. (Mr. Price was purser of the *Cyane*.) Just before he left he saw President Polk, who, in the then disturbed relations between the United States and Mexico, expressed great anxiety in regard to the possible contingency of hostilities occurring between the two countries, and said, "that should it happen, California should be seized by the naval forces in the Pacific and held as indemnification for the expenses of carrying on such a war," and Mr. Price was fully impressed with the policy of the President.\*

The *Cyane* joined the Pacific squadron in January, 1846, finding Commodore Sloat then commanding the squadron in the flag-ship frigate *Savannah*, at Mazatlan, on the west coast of Mexico, where a large naval force was concentrated of American and English ships—Sir George Seymour, the English admiral, having his flag on the *Collingwood*, a hundred-gun ship.

At the time of the *Cyane's* arrival, much excitement existed in both squadrons and on shore in regard to the anticipated rupture between the United States and Mexico. It was understood and believed that the English Government meant to seize or throw protection over California in case of war, as indemnity for the debt owing by Mexico to England. Therefore there was great anxiety for news, and much importance placed as to which squadron would first receive intelligence of war, as the fate of California depended upon it.

Soon after the *Cyane's* arrival, Lieutenant Archibald Gillespie, United States Marine Corps, came to Mazatlan, having crossed Mexico with despatches to Commodore Sloat and Captain Frémont. The latter was then supposed to be in California or Oregon, and Captain Mervine was ordered to land him (Gillespie) at some port where he could best communicate with Frémont, and about February 1st the *Cyane* sailed for the Sandwich Islands to deceive the English admiral as to her ultimate destination, and the offer to carry the English mail to the islands was made and accepted. The *Cyane* sailed direct for Honolulu, and thence to Monterey, Cal., arriving about March 1st, when we learned through our consul, Thomas O. Larkin, that Frémont had been at San Juan (some forty miles from Monterey) a short time previous to our arrival, and had sent a messenger to Mr. Larkin requesting supplies for his party, and that the Mexican authorities had forbidden any supplies being sent to him, and that General Castro, the Military Governor of California, had ordered Frémont to leave Mexican territory. As no attention was paid to this, Castro sent a very insolent note threatening to drive him out by military force. This threat Frémont treated with silent contempt, but he could get no supplies, which his command greatly needed.

General Castro then marched a strong military force against him. Frémont fortified himself and waited to receive him. Castro's force lay in sight some time without attacking, but made every effort to cut off his supply of water, and by siege compel him to surrender.

Frémont was starved out and left his position, and offered battle, which Castro declined, and Frémont went north.

Gillespie was left at Monterey, and pursued and overtook Frémont, who returned with him to Sutter's Fort. The *Cyane* returned to Mazatlan in April, and reported these facts to the commodore. The excitement had greatly intensified by the rumor that General Santa Anna had crossed the Rio Grande with a large force, and that General Taylor was in command of the American forces in Texas, and a battle anticipated.

Soon the sloop of war *Portsmouth*, Captain Montgomery, was despatched to San Francisco, Cal., and the *Levant*, Captain Page, to Monterey, Cal.; the *Warren*, Captain Hull, having been previously sent there. The destination of these vessels was not made known to the English admiral, who had sent the English frigate *Juno* to sea, without the usual formality of informing Commodore Sloat of her destination. But an English priest, Father McNamara, who had come across Mexico, had mysteriously taken passage in her. About June 1st the *Cyane* was again ordered to Monterey, Cal.—the belief then existing, from rumors, that a fight had occurred be-

\* Mr. Price had recently been a guest at the White House, on a visit there to Knox Walker, secretary and nephew of the President.



tween the American and Mexican forces, and this belief was largely entertained by our consul, Mr. Parrott, who, about that time, set out for the City of Mexico—Commodore Sloat and the English admiral having all this time remained at Mazatlan.

After the *Cyane* sailed, the commodore received a despatch from Guadalajara, from Mr. Parrott, informing him of the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, which occurred in May.

The *Cyane* arrived at Monterey the last of June, and found the *Levant* and *Warren* at anchor, and heard that the *Portsmouth* was at (Yerba Buena) San Francisco, and what is curious, rumors were afloat that a battle had occurred on the Rio Grande, and the result detailed with some minuteness, which had come through Indian sources, which afterwards proved to be very accurate.

It was also learned that the English frigate *Juno* was at Santa Barbara, and that Father McNamara was negotiating with the Civil Governor and authorities for a grant of land in California, intended for European colonization, which was a part of the English design to acquire California, and so understood at the time.

Some days after our arrival, about July 1st, Commodore Sloat arrived, and it was confidently believed by the officers of the squadron that he would land at once, hoist our flag, and take possession of California, and all felt that the Fourth day of July was an appropriate day to do it.

The positive news of the battles through Mr. Parrott, and the feeling to chastise General Castro for his insult to our flag, and the wanton outrage upon Frémont, fully justified and demanded such a course: but to the disappointment and chagrin of all, the commodore sent his flag-lieutenant, Joseph Adams, ashore, and, as if a friendly port, desired to know when salutes would be exchanged.

In the meantime a very strong feeling had arisen with the native Californians against us, induced by English and French agents and the anticipated war with us. The friendly influences which had been cultivated by American residents, and our consul, Mr. Larkin, who had been many years in California, had made many friends among the Californians, and our trading-ships on the coast, which supplied all their wants and had taken all their exports (hides and tallow) and dealt honestly with the people, had contributed to American influence; but all this had been greatly changed, and the English sentiment had arisen, and a preference expressed for England's protection: a majority of the people greatly preferred that California should fall to England rather than to the United States. The French people, also, in California were against us and in favor of English plans.

The French consul, after we occupied Monterey, was detected in communicating with the Californians, and giving them information as to our military movements. So flagrant was his conduct that Commodore Stockton confined him to his house until he left the country.

Several days after Commodore Sloat's arrival, and on Sunday afternoon, July 5th, a sail was reported coming into the Bay of Monterey. All glasses were turned upon it, and it was watched with great interest. It proved to be the launch of the sloop of war *Portsmouth*, with Past-Midshipman Napoleon Harrison and sixteen men, sent by Captain Montgomery—he having heard of the *Cyane's* arrival at Monterey (Captain Mervine being his senior officer). The presence of the commodore was not known when the launch left. Harrison went to the flag-ship and delivered despatches.

Captain Montgomery had been requested by Frémont to send him supplies and munitions of war, and Major Gillespie had come from Sutter's fort to receive them, Frémont stating that American settlers in the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys were much alarmed by the Californians' threatening movements, and had asked his protection, and that he needed the supplies to defend his own party and protect the lives and property of the Americans, and Montgomery wanted to know whether he should comply with Frémont's request.

Sloat immediately replied, instructing Montgomery *not to give Frémont any aid whatever*, but to obey strictly our treaty stipulations with Mexico. He also ordered his answer to be handed to Lieutenant Harrison, directing him to shove off, and return to his ship at once. It was then growing dark, and a high westerly wind prevailing. The men had been in the launch fifty-six hours. The order seemed so harsh to send Harrison off at night-fall in such tempestuous weather to the executive officer of the *Savannah* (Livingston), that he appealed to the commodore to allow Harrison to remain until daylight the next morning, and to allow his men to

come on board and sleep, and be refreshed—they were wet and their limbs had been cramped. This request was granted.

These circumstances and facts had been learned by Mr. Price immediately from Captain Mervine, who was on board the flag-ship when the despatches were received from Montgomery, and Sloat had told him the character of his reply and instructions, at which he was greatly disappointed, and thought it a grave mistake of the commodore's.

Mr. Price made the facts known to the ward-room officers, who discussed them, and all felt that it was a fatal error, that the commodore was not carrying out the policy or wishes of the Government—jeopardizing its interests and sacrificing its honor.

Mr. Price considered the moment so critical that, as if by inspiration, he said, that if it were possible to get a boat, it then being quite late at night and after the crew had turned in, he felt he would be only doing a duty to go and see the commodore and urge him to reconsider his action. Upon reflection he decided to ask Captain Mervine for a boat, and stated his object for desiring it. Mervine said there was no use of going to see the commodore, that he himself had said everything against his order to Montgomery, but wished him to give all the aid and supplies that Frémont required, but added, "*you shall have it if you desire it.*" The request was repeated, Mr. Price saying that he would like to present to the commodore the views of President Polk, as given to him a few days before the *Cyane* sailed from Norfolk.

First-Lieutenant Rowan, executive officer of the *Cyane*, was ordered to have the captain's gig called away for Mr. Price to go on board the flag-ship. Mr. Price was received on board the flag-ship by First-Lieutenant Livingston, who said the commodore had turned in, his cabin lights were out, and it was doubtful whether he would receive him, but would send in an orderly and see; and an answer was returned that he would. The cabin was lighted and the commodore came out of his state-room in his night-dress.

Mr. Price apologized for disturbing him, and stated that his visit was induced at that unusual hour by information he had received from Captain Mervine, who had informed him of the character of the communication from Captain Montgomery, and the reply to it—that he must pardon the intrusion and venture of coming to him, under the circumstances, to urge the reconsideration of his letters of instruction to Captain Montgomery denying Frémont the supplies he wanted to defend himself and protect American citizens and their property.

Feeling as Mr. Price did, that upon the decision of the commodore rested the loss or gain of California to the United States, he urged upon him every view and reason possible to recall the letter and show the evils which would result to himself as well as to his country, if Frémont was not sustained and our flag immediately raised on shore and a military occupation declared.

The evidence of hostilities existing between us and Mexico was dwelt upon—his delay would certainly give California to England. The English policy and intention was clear—the English frigate *Juno* was at Santa Barbara; that Admiral Seymour was following him with the intention of landing and occupying California. Under the circumstances, there was only one course to pursue to meet the expectations of his country. The first and only reply Sloat made was, that he did not want to fall into the same mistake that Commodore Jones made two years before. The great difference of circumstances which existed at that time and the present were pointed out, and that delay would undoubtedly bring about a serious complication with the English, if not a fight; that he could not witness the raising of the English flag over California without remonstrance, active and forcible. After silent reflection, Sloat yielded to the entreaty of Mr. Price, and decided to recall the letter to Captain Montgomery, and not only ordered him to furnish all the supplies and all the aid to Frémont he required, but also, on the receipt of the order, to raise the flag immediately at San Francisco, informing him the flag would be raised by him the next morning, being July 7, 1846, at Monterey. That he would receive therewith a copy of the proclamation under which California would be occupied by us. The proclamation was written that night before Mr. Price had left the *Savannah*; and he returned to his ship, receiving the congratulations of his captain and mess-mates as having performed a signal service. He bore orders to Captain Mervine, the senior officer of the fleet, to go ashore at daylight in the morning and notify the Mexican military and civil authorities that the commodore would land a force at ten o'clock that day to take possession of California in the name of the United States Government.



Captain Mervine performed this service, taking with him Lieutenant Edward Higgins, and Purser Price as his aides. Arrangements were accordingly made, and a force of sailors and marines numbering about two hundred and fifty, taken from the different vessels, were landed, and the flag, in charge of Lieutenant Higgins, was raised on the flag-staff of the Custom-House, and the Proclamation of Occupation was read by Purser Price, in Spanish and in English, before our own force and the assembled citizens of the place, from the porch of the Custom-House. Our sailors and marines then occupied the Mexican barracks, which the troops of General Castro had just vacated, and every military precaution was taken to resist attack.

The English admiral arrived a few days afterward, and the first thing he said on receiving the commodore was, "Sloat, if your flag was not flying on shore I should have hoisted mine there."

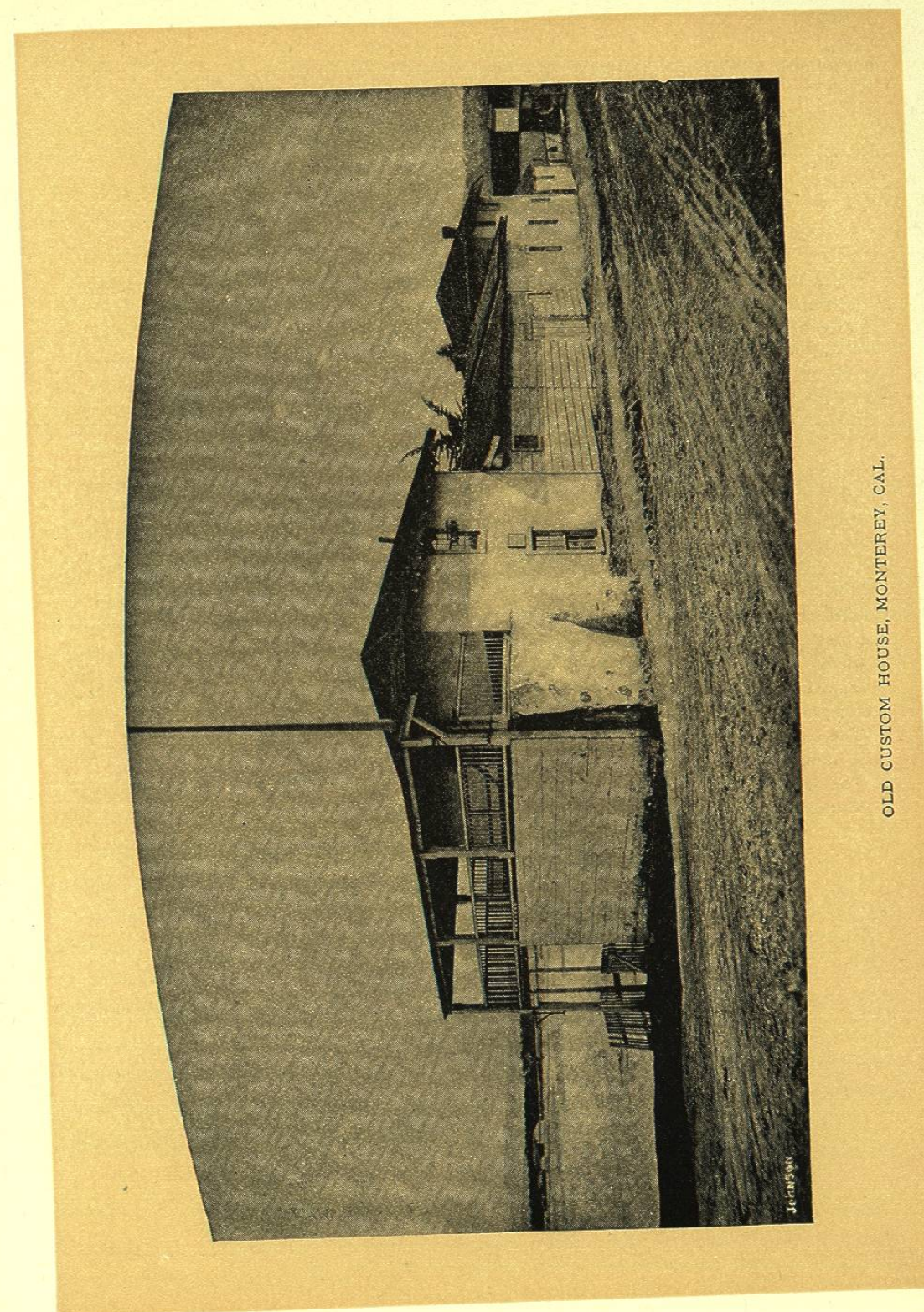
Purser Price was appointed prefect and alcalde, and has the distinction of having first administered American law in California, under the "Proclamation of Occupation."

Frémont organized a military battalion, and afforded protection to Americans at Sutter's Fort, and marched south to punish General Castro for the warfare they had waged against him. This military organization of Frémont's is historically known as the renowned California Battalion, and became the active power of subduing California. And in a revolt of the Californians to our authority after their submission, Frémont's command again brought them to submission. About two weeks after the flag was raised, Frémont came with his command to Monterey and volunteered their services to Commodore Stockton, who had succeeded Sloat, and was anxious to carry an active war against the Californians in arms against us.

The English admiral was still at Monterey when Frémont came, and looked on with his officers with much interest. It was, indeed, a novel and interesting sight—the command, numbering two or three hundred men, marching in a square, within which was the cattle which they were driving for their subsistence. They were mostly clothed in buckskin, and armed with Hawkins rifles. The individuality of each man was very remarkable. When they dismounted, their first care was their rifle. Frémont, by his explorations and the geographical and scientific knowledge he had given to the world, was the conspicuous figure. The hunters and guides of his exploring party were the next objects sought for. Kit Carson and the Indians accompanying him were the objects of much attention.

The command carried terror and dismay to the Californians; the unerring and deadly rifle in the hands of the frontiersmen was equally dreaded by the Indian.

The prompt, decisive action taken by Frémont before Sloat raised the flag forced Sloat to do so, and was the great cause which conspired to the acquisition of California.



OLD CUSTOM HOUSE, MONTEREY, CAL.